

The Order of Deacon: Stepping stone to being ordained a pastor - 2

Episcopal Church: “You will serve as a deacon for at least 6 months before being ordained a priest.”¹

The ELCA: “You will serve as a deacon for at least 6 months before being ordained a pastor.”

Is this true? Not yet, but soon.² ELCA deacons are “good,” but they are **not good enough**. They are **clergy**, as the ELCA-Episcopal unity agreement *Called to Common Mission (CCM)* requires. They are **ordained**, as CCM requires. But they are still **not good enough!**

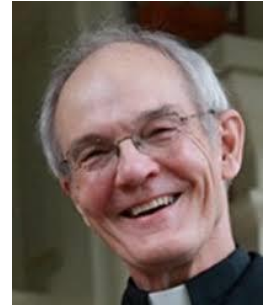
Living Lutheran recently featured a number of deacons—Margaret Schmitt Ajer, Nancy Gabel, Sue Rothmeyer, David Larrabee, Deb Haynes, Kate Lawler-Wunch, Emily Myallis.³ They are uplifted as those who are doing “prophetic diakonia,” including “risk-taking and innovative service on the frontiers of the church’s outreach giving particular attention to the suffering places in God’s world.”⁴ Yet, no matter how important their service, these ordained deacons are **not good enough!**

The ELCA must have transitional deacons, that is, a candidate preparing to be ordained a pastor, must first be **ordained a deacon** and serve as deacon for 6 months or so. The ELCA must do ministry like the Episcopal Church does – the Catholic way. It is implicit in *CCM* ¶16. **Transitional deacons are required.**



Living Lutheran, March 2020, p. 15.

Michael Cooper-White, the author of the article on deacons in *Living Lutheran* (March 2020), is the former President of Gettysburg Seminary, now director for Lutheran formation at Union Seminary, New York City. He is not naïve or gullible. As you can see by his picture, he is friendly-looking. But he is not being honest about the past, present, and future of ELCA deacons. He is not honest about why the ELCA ordained deacons, why certain changes had to happen, what additional changes are coming, and why. A few examples from Michael Cooper-White's article (in black below) in *Living Lutheran*, March 2020 (commentary in red):



Michael Cooper-White

- “In 1995 the ELCA created a new lay category ‘diaconal ministers’ while retaining its roster for deaconesses and associates in ministry.”⁵ **No, it was 1993. Moreover, the Assembly opposed ordained diaconal ministers. It defeated a motion to ordain diaconal ministers by a vote of 631-341. Subsequently the Assembly voted to accept “lay diaconal ministers” by a vote of 790-192.**
- “But a few years ago the church launched a round of discussions about rostered leadership that culminated in the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to combine the lay rosters into the current roster of Ministers of Word and Service and to establish the title of deacon.”⁶ **This is a red herring. The “round of discussions” was a sham because the outcome was predetermined by CCM in 1999: The ELCA had to have deacons in order to achieve “fully realized” full communion (CCM ¶14; ¶16). The ELCA had to do it.**
- “A 2019 Churchwide Assembly vote determined that the entrance for deacons will be ordination.”⁷ **Again, a red herring. The outcome was predetermined by CCM. The ELCA had to ordain deacons. It is part of the CCM contract. The ELCA had to do it.**
- “The ELCA has two groups of rostered leaders.”⁸ **More dishonesty. The ELCA has three groups of clergy: Bishops, pastors, and deacons. Bishops and pastors are not equal. Bishops have a separate and higher office. They are consecrated by the laying on of hands into this office. This rite is required; it gives bishops power which pastors lack. Bishops “exercise solely this church’s power to ordain” (S8.12c). Thus the ELCA has three distinct groups, three ranks, of clergy: Bishops, pastors, and deacons.**
- “‘Helping people understand her calling has been a challenge,’ [Deacon Nancy] Gable said....”⁹ “Like other deacons, Emily [Myallis] has encountered some confusion about her calling.”¹⁰ **Confusion about her calling? No wonder. More confusion is coming. Just wait until Michael Cooper-White, Bishop Michael Rinehart, and others announce (in 2022?) that the ELCA has decided that candidates preparing to be ordained as pastors must first be ordained as deacons and serve as deacons for about 6 months. The ELCA, like the Episcopal Church, will then have permanent deacons and transitional deacons. No matter how ELCA leaders sell it, the real reason is because of CCM (adopted in 1999). CCM is like a mortgage with a balloon payment, and transitional deacons are part of the balloon payment. They are the deacons who really count.**
- **Bishops for life – this, too, is required by CCM. It’s coming, but because of the basic dishonesty of ELCA leaders, the real reason – CCM – will not be openly discussed.**

End Notes

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- ¹ The Canons of the Episcopal Church, III.8.6.a, and 7.1 “**III.8. Of the Ordination of Priests. Sec 6. Ordination to the Diaconate for those called to the Priesthood** (a) “A Candidate must first be ordained Deacon before being ordained Priest; **Sec. 7 Ordination to the Priesthood** (a) A person may be ordained Priest: (1) after at least six months since ordination as a Deacon under this Canon and eighteen months from the time of acceptance of nomination by the Nominee as provided in III.8.2(b).” Bolding in original texts.
- ² The defects in Lutheran ministry must be fixed before the Episcopal Church declares full communion is “fully realized”: “For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the characteristics of the goal of full communion—defined in its 1991 policy statement, ‘Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’—will be realized at this time [2001]. **For the Episcopal Church, full communion, although begun at the same time, will not be fully realized until both churches determine that in the context of a common life and mission there is a shared ministry of bishops in the historic episcopate**” (CCM ¶14). Bolding added here and below for emphasis.
- ³ Michael Cooper-White, “They bring good news. Understanding the ELCA’s rostered ministers,” *The Living Lutheran*, March 2020, pp.14-19.
- ⁴ ELCA Constitution ¶7.61.02.
- ⁵ *Living Lutheran*, 15.
- ⁶ *Living Lutheran*, 15.
- ⁷ *Living Lutheran*, 15.
- ⁸ *Living Lutheran*, 15.
- ⁹ *Living Lutheran*, 19.
- ¹⁰ *Living Lutheran*, 17.